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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: VAN GOGH KILLING SHOCKS DUTCH NATION

11. (SBU) Summary: The brutal murder November 3 of prominent Dutch film director/personality Theo van Gogh by a Dutch Moroccan in bright daylight in an Amsterdam street has rocked Dutch society. The murder recalls the assassination in 2002 of maverick politician Pim Fortuyn, who, like Van Gogh, criticized Islam and challenged political correctness. Dutch politicians and opinion makers universally condemned the attack as a blow against free speech and democracy, but the killing also spotlighted the growing problem of pockets of Islamic extremists in the Netherlands. The killing coincides with changes in the GoNL's counterterrorism system and criticism of Dutch security services. While some politicians called for tough action against those who aim to undermine the principles of our society, others warned against seeking simple solutions. The government urged the nation to stay calm and to refrain from retaliation against certain groups. Security measures have been taken and public protests thus far have been largely peaceful. End summary.

The Assassination

12. (U) The cold-blooded murder of Theo van Gogh, as he was riding his bike along an Amsterdam street on the morning of November 3, hit the Netherlands like a bombshell. Van Gogh was a well-known publicist, movie director and opinion maker (and grandson of Van Gogh's brother Theo) with outspoken opinions, whose blunt criticism of Islam had often provoked sharp criticism within Islamic circles. Recently, he made a film called Submission with Liberal (VVD) parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a staunch fighter for the liberation of Muslim women, about the abuse of Muslim women. The film showed women in transparent robes on whose bodies were projected texts from the Koran that are hostile to women. The film triggered fierce protests from Muslim circles, and both Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali received death threats. Hirsi Ali accepted police protection, Van Gogh reportedly did not.

The Killer

13. (U) According to press reports, the murder appeared to take the form of a ritual execution. Van Gogh was shot multiple times, stabbed, and the killer attempted to behead him. The murderer left a knife stuck in his chest (clearly visible in press photos) and pinned a five-page pamphlet to his body that called for a Jihad against infidels. The murderer, apprehended after a brief shootout in which a policeman was wounded, carried a farewell letter.

14. (U) Dutch police revealed that the murderer was a 26-year old inhabitant of Amsterdam with both Dutch and Moroccan citizenship. The press identified him as Mohammed B., born and raised in Amsterdam. One newspaper reported that Mohammed B. went twice on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia in recent years. He is said to be affiliated with the radical El Tawheed mosque, and is an associate of Samir Azzouz, a Moroccan in prison on suspicion of preparing terrorist attacks on Schiphol, the Second Chamber and the Borssele nuclear plant.

15. (SBU) Embarrassingly for the government, press reports note that the suspect had been known to the Dutch National Intelligence Agency for some time. Internal Affairs Minister Remkes told parliament on November 3 that the suspect was to be found around a group of extremist Muslims that has the AIVD's attention, but he did not belong to the core group. According to Remkes and Justice Minister Donner, the assassin may have acted on grounds of radical Islamic convictions, but the available information gave no cause to assume that he was making preparations for violent actions.

More arrests

16. (U) On November 3-4, Dutch police arrested eight radical Muslims youths (six Moroccans, a Spanish Moroccan and an Algerian) between the ages of 19 and 27. During house searches, computers, books and fundamentalist pamphlets were seized. The arrested Muslims reportedly belonged to the same Islamic circles as Mohammed.

Reactions

17. (U) The entire nation reacted with outrage to the killing. The Queen, Prime Minister, cabinet members, politicians, media and spokesmen for Muslim organizations all condemned the murder as a blatant attack on the traditional Dutch values of free speech and democracy. Although the government allowed and encouraged peaceful demonstrations of sympathy following the murder, it also took quick action to discourage rioting, such as posting additional police to key areas and blocking off certain areas of major cities from demonstrations. Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen warned against reactions based on hatred and fear between native Dutch and Moroccans on either side. Noting that the Amsterdam population of about 870,000 included about 120,000 Muslims, Cohen rejected excluding Muslims from dialogue but did call for tough action against idle youth.

18. (U) Predictably, some politicians on the right immediately called for decisive action against radical Islamic groups. Others on the left warned against taking drastic action prematurely, pointing out that there were no simple solutions to a difficult social issue. Politicians were united in expressing warnings that population groups should not be set against each other, and encouraged Muslim and minority groups to join the common battle against radicalization and violence.

COMMENT:

19. (SBU) The murder of van Gogh brutally highlighted divisions within Dutch society. Like the assassinated populist politician Pim Fortuyn, Van Gogh also spoke out against those in the Muslim community who, in his view, abused traditional Dutch tolerance to pursue intolerant policies. The murder of Van Gogh forced Dutch society to confront the reality that their tradition of tolerance does not make them immune from Islamic extremist violence.

110. (SBU) Objectively, the Dutch record on integration is mixed. The Muslim population of the Netherlands grew from a few thousand in the 1960s to about one million (out of a total population of 16 million) at present. Dutch separate but equal policies have left them isolated largely in big city ghettos. Hundreds of thousands speak little or no Dutch. For a long time, native Dutch chose not to deal with this fact, arguing that the tolerant policy was to let migrants live in their own culture. After Fortuyn challenged this, the Dutch government took on a wide range of measures to advance their integration. However, large groups of unassimilated immigrants (especially Moroccan youth) still function within insular social pockets separate from mainstream Holland. They are a prime source of recruitment for religious extremist groups, youth gangs and other criminal organizations.

111. (SBU) While Pim Fortuyn's own party is on the verge of collapse, other politicians on the right are likely to benefit politically from the frustration and anger generated by the Van Gogh murder. Key among them is the outspoken independent MP Geert Wilders, who recently left the conservative VVD party that includes Hirsi Ali to found his own Liberal Conservative Party on the far right of the Dutch political spectrum. Fortuyn's spiritual heirs (including Wilders and Hirsi Ali) argue that the failure to integrate new immigrants into Dutch society is a major factor contributing to increases in crime and violence. The internal debate sparked by this assassination could dominate the Dutch domestic political calendar, spilling over into other issues such as Turkish accession to the EU, Dutch involvement in Iraq, and domestic social and economic reforms.

Sobel